Editorial: In Search of the Sixties

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There are two ways of approaching the Sixties. As the decade when the postwar baby boomers reached early adulthood, the 1960s can be viewed as a site of powerful nostalgia for defining cultural or social experiences: the Vietnam War with its drafts and protests, the Beatles' conquest of popular culture, the assassinations of iconic figures like John and Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Or it can be approached historically, as a decade of transformation culminating in 1968, a year of worldwide protest, largely student led, that ushered in our experience of the world as a global village at the same time as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia signaled the polarization of East and West.

It was a decade of extreme contrasts: of the Cold War, flower power and the counter-culture, of American civil rights and the Berlin Wall, of movements that united and decisions that divided the global community. It was the decade when feminism and the advent of the contraceptive pill challenged inherited ideas about the traditional roles and capabilities of women, and *The Sound of Music* (1965) was the highest-grossing Hollywood film.[1] It was the decade when the vision and achievement of the moon landing was offset by the ever-present possibility of global nuclear conflict.

Music played its part in creating the narrative of the Sixties, more comfortably perhaps in popular than so-called high-art or experimental music. Darmstadt and Donaueschingen never quite drew the crowds that Woodstock attracted; Timothy Leary's invitation to 'Turn on, tune in, drop out' did not suggest a new way forward in the post-tonal world of musical serialism. Nonetheless, the debates, dilemmas and discourses around 'serious' music were in their own way reflective of broader concerns of the decade, as may be seen in the articles by Green, and Whiteoak and Green.

We have made no attempt to give a systematic account of music in the 1960s in the eclectic selection of articles that make up this issue of *Musicology Australia*. Even so, themes and synchronicities emerge and links are established with larger events and currents of change. The essays divide in various ways: some concern themselves with world trends, others with local responses; some use specific topics as a lens onto wider 1960s' themes, others consider the overall significance of the decade in different countries.

In the opening essay, Mark Carroll revisits his (and his teenage son's) youthful response to Jimi Hendrix's 'The Burning of the Midnight Lamp', arguing that 'in its style and idea [it] captures the essential contradictions between the British and American psychedelic movements'. At the same time, Carroll finds analogies between Hendrix's personal encounter with 'existential' alienation, as manifested in the song, and that of J.-P. Sartre's hero Roquentin in the novel *La Nausée*. Hendrix was one of a number of prominent musicians and performers of the 1960s who died of drug overdoses. In his analysis of this

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1 Christopher Booker, *The Neophiliacs: A Study of the Revolution in English Life in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: Gambit Incorporated, 1970). It is third on the list of all-time inflation-adjusted box office hits, behind *Gone with the Wind* and *Star Wars*. See (accessed July 2010), http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=soundofmusic.htm

song, which Hendrix himself maintained was his best, Carroll explores deeper reasons for Hendrix's introspective malaise, including the role of hallucinogenic experiences, enquiring how the song's less than favorable reception resonated with and intensified Hendrix's personal and artistic uncertainties.

If, as Carroll argues, 'The Burning of the Midnight Lamp' challenges the more clichéd psychedelic trope, as centered on 'the sensory and/or faux mystic-spiritual aspects of the hallucinatory experience', Bronia Kornhauser's investigation of the genealogy of another iconic 1960s song calls into question the validity of claims to social identity through music. When Dick Dale and the Del-Tones released their recording of 'Misirlou' in 1962, it was hailed as a surf rock anthem that captured, through the purely instrumental sound of Dale's guitar, 'the sensations and pulsations of riding a wave'. The song's imagined link to the 1960s, to Southern California and to surf culture was consolidated in 1994, when Quentin Tarantino not only used it as the opening theme of his movie *Pulp Fiction*, but to characterize his gun-toting, hit-man hero Vincent Vega. As the theme of *Pulp Fiction*, Dale's 1960s incarnation of 'Misirlou' became a topic of American retro media culture, at least in the perception of an American (and perhaps world) audience. Ten years later, in the concluding ceremony of the 2004 Greek Olympics, the same melody in a suitably inflected performance to a Greek-language version of the lyrics, was presented to the world as part of a quintessentially Greek entertainment spectacular. Using these and other recorded exemplars of the tune's transformations and appropriations over almost a century, Kornhauser interrogates the authenticity of any claimed link between this melody and a specific place of origin or national group.

The pursuit of individual freedoms and rejection of social restraint were catch cries of the hedonistic youth who participated in the social revolutions of the counterculture in much of the western world in the second half of the 1960s. Two articles explore the Sixties in countries where the pursuit of personal expression and professional advancement in imitation of western models involved more complicated accommodations of prevailing political ideologies or religious sensibilities. Sabina Pǎuţa Pieslak's survey of music and politics in 1960s Romania suggests that almost as much creative ingenuity was required from composers hoping to reconcile the regime's calls for new socialist or nationalist music with an awareness of innovative musical developments elsewhere as in the act of composition itself. Although Romanian composers benefited from the state's increasing openness to the West, they did so against internal resistance from an older, more conservative generation of musical ideologues, and in the knowledge that the situation could change for the worse at any moment. As indeed it did, in the early 1970s, when the Ceauşescus called the country to its own 'cultural revolution' and the period of greater freedom came to an end. Gay Breyley documents the complexities of the shift that took place in Iranian popular music under the influence of the monarchy's attempts to 'modernize' the nation through a policy of westernization. She demonstrates how Iranian society, against the background of a generalized fear of the negative effects of western influence, was torn between two seemingly opposite trends: one, to be modern; and the other, to keep its identity—'hoping' no longer to be considered 'backward', 'fearing' to lose its traditions. She discusses how this 'hope and fear' was reflected in different styles of the Iranian popular music of the time, and in the constructions that the Iranian intellectuals attached to them.

Establishing a relationship with the cultural super-powers of the western world was also a preoccupation in Australia, although not one that carried with it the risks of incarceration or revolution. Geoff King's account of Melbourne's popular music industry demonstrates

how the 'charts'—themselves a innovation of the 1960s—were dominated by American and (post-Beatles) British music, and the extent to which local musicians were influenced by overseas trends. Rolf Harris may have written his Australian classic 'Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport' in 1957 (it became a hit in Australia in 1960), and the Seekers' 'Georgy Girl' may have topped UK charts in 1966, but Australian pop music did not find its own voice until the 1970s. Articles in the final section of the journal explore the intersection of the local with the global, offering different perspectives on the Melbourne musical scene in the 1960s and inviting us to consider what it was that distinguished Australia in the 1960s and how the Sixties are to be characterized as an historical period in Australia.

In their introductory mission statement, the American editors of the journal *The Sixties* are able to propose a view of that historical period in the USA that is tied to key events in American history: the Vietnam War and black civil rights.[2] Is it possible to do something similar in Australia; and if so, what defining events would one select? We have thought to frame the Sixties chronologically as an historical period with two seemingly unconnected events, starting with the 1956 Olympic Games, which briefly focused the eyes of the world on Melbourne and symbolically brought the world to our doorstep. More importantly for our purpose, the Games marked the introduction of television to Australia. Television allowed the experience of major public events into our homes and began to overcome the 'tyranny of distance' and dissolve established degrees of cultural separation. It was far easier to pick the event that marked the end of the Sixties as a long decade: the election of Gough Whitlam's federal Labor government in 1972 after twenty-three years of Liberal-Country Party conservative administration. If the Sixties is to be viewed as a decade of transformation, in which Australia's baby boomers sought to react against a generation whose conservatism was shaped by the great Depression and the vicissitudes of the Second World War, the impulse towards social and political change was slow to impact on public life. Henry Bolte's Liberal Party governed Victoria for this entire period.[3]

The Sixties was not a time of resolution, but it was a decade in which seeds of change in Australia's public consciousness were planted: first, in relation to the treatment of the indigenous population and acknowledgment of the injustices of the country's colonial past; and secondly, in relation to the incorporation of non-British European migrants (and eventually non-European migrants) and the country's multicultural future.

The timeline charting the emergence of the rights of the indigenous people from the late 1950s and the early 1970s, prepared by the Museum of Australia, tellingly situates national developments within a global context, but developments in Australia were strikingly less violent. Although Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared in support of the South African government's right to pass apartheid laws,[4] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people achieved the right to vote in federal elections (in 1962) and, following a national referendum (under Menzies' successor, Liberal Harold Holt, in 1967), to be counted in the

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2 Jeremy Varon, Michael D. Voley and John McMillan, 'Editorial: Time is an Ocean: The Past and Future of the Sixties', *The Sixties* 1/1, 2008, 5.

3 Bolte retired in August 1972 and was replaced by Rupert Hamer; Whitlam was elected in December.

4 'After Menzies refused to condemn the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, South African Prime Minister Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd informed him that he was the "best friend South Africa has"'. Peter Limb, 'An Australian Historian at the Dawn of Apartheid: Fred Alexander in South Africa, 1949–50', *The Electronic Journal of Australian and New Zealand History*, first published online 1 October 1999. Limb is citing R.G. Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events* (Penguin, Ringwood, Vic. 1969; citing H. Verwoerd to Menzies, 24 April 1961), 192–202 (accessed July 2010), http://www.jcu.edu.au/aff/history/pdf/limb.pdf

national census.[5] By the end of the decade, land rights had appeared on the indigenous agenda, although Mr. Justice Blackburn ruled in 1971 that Australia had been *terra nullius* before European settlement and that there was no such thing as native title in Australian law, a decision that was not rejected until the Mabo judgment of 1992. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's historic 'apology' would not happen until 2009.[6]

The Vietnam War cast its shadow over Australia for much of the chronological decade. Between 1962 and 1972, a total of 47,000 Australian soldiers served in Vietnam. Combat troops were committed from the mid-1960s, many of them conscripted after the Conservative government reintroduced a National Service scheme in 1964. Attitudes towards Australia's involvement in Vietnam—a consequence of treaty relationships with the USA forged in the early 1950s and a shared fear of communist influence in the Asia region—divided the community. But whereas the first anti-war protest occurred as early as 1963, the great public moratoriums did not begin until May 1970. Much of the music came from the USA, although Geoff King cites Australian band Axiom's Vietnam allegory 'Arkansas Grass' as exemplifying a concern with social issues among local musicians that was not uncommon. But the Vietnam War was not 'our' war, although at this time Australians still struggled to find an individual voice in world affairs as in their cultural life.

Australia was slow to relinquish its allegiance to a pro-British mono-cultural code of the pre-war years, but the 1960s saw increasing scrutiny of the idea that the two million migrants who arrived in Australia between 1945 and 1965 should abandon their own cultures and languages (in the case of the non-English speaking Europeans) and rapidly become indistinguishable from the host population. British migrants were the largest component of the intake until 1953, and then again in the 1960s, but migrants from Southern Europe outnumbered British between 1953 and late 1956 and Melbourne became the city with the greatest concentration of Italian migration. John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell explore the development of a vigorous and self-sustaining Italian-Australian entertainment scene within the Italian community, examining the ways in which musical repertoire, performers and venues accommodated changing generational preferences among their clientele, while also engaging with both Italian and British-American musical modernity. Although as yet these developments were contained within a specific group, their acceptance allowed an immigrant influence to begin to intervene in the American and British dominance of mainstream Australian culture.

Conservatism was the hallmark of institutional music-making in the immediate post-war period, but by the 1960s younger composers and musicians were beginning to claim attention. Two strategies are documented here. Whiteoak and Green show how, as a gifted amateur whose livelihood was not dependent on his music-making, Val Stephens pursued his interest in experimental electronic music without reference to his social milieu. George Dreyfus, on the other hand, took his battle for the cause of (German-inspired) international modernism to the streets, challenging at once the old guard, the Sydney cult of personality and any local competitors. Green's account of the rise and demise of the Melbourne chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music is a lively

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5 For the timeline, see (accessed July 2010), http://www.indigenousrights.net.au/timeline.asp?startyear=1960

6 Nominally an apology to the so-called 'stolen generation' of aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their families by paternalistic government and church administrations between c.1869 and 1969, Rudd sought more broadly to 'turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.' The text of the apology may be found online (accessed July 2010), http://www.abc.net.au/news/events/apology/text.htm

testimony to how quickly the local becomes personal, with all that implies in terms of vitality and destructiveness.

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